

Dysentery and the Diarrheal Diseases.

State Department of Health of Maine.

Under the rules and regulations of the State Department of Health dysentery is put in the list of notifiable diseases. This is because of the fact that it is an infectious disease dangerous to the public health. It is the duty of parents and householders, as well as of physicians, to report cases to the local boards of health so that the family may be helped to prevent the spread of the infection.

That which is true of dysentery is also true of the diarrheal diseases of children, particularly of those which are so prevalent during the summer months and which cause the death of many babies. The infectious matter is given off by the sick ones in the discharges from the bowels, and in some cases the sick continue to thus give off the infection for some time after they have apparently fully recovered.

It is also true that the indigestion which is the result of improper feeding has much to do with increasing the sickness-rate and the death-rate from the diarrheal diseases and in preparing the way for the infectious diarrheas. Every mother and every expectant mother should be supplied with a copy of Circular 271, Hints on Nursing the Baby, and Circular 272, How to Feed the Baby, issued by this Department.

How the Infection is Spread.

These infectious diarrheal diseases are spread just as typhoid fever is spread—particles of the infectious matter passed from the bowels find their way into the mouths and into the stomachs of other persons. An invisible trace of this infection may be enough to give the disease to another person.

These are some of the ways this infection may be spread: (1) The person caring for the sick soils her hands with the discharges from the patient. Unless she washes them thoroughly the invisible trace of the infectious matter remaining upon her fingers may be carried directly to her own mouth or may infect her own food or that of other persons. (2) The domestic well or other source of water supply may become polluted by the discharges being thrown out where a little of the infectious matter may find its way into the water by surface drainage or by soakage through the soil. (3) Flies, in their flight from the sick room or from privies or other places where the discharges have been thrown may carry the infection to the pantry or the table or other place where milk, cake, bread or other food may be; or flies may carry the infection directly to the lips of the sleeping babe.

Prevention.

For the prevention of the further spread of dysentery or infectious diarrhea after a case has occurred in a house, the following seven rules should be put into effect very promptly:

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Rule 1. Care should be taken to limit, just so far as possible, the infection of things by the discharges from the bowels of persons suffering from dysentery, or from children who have this disease or infantile diarrhea. Clothing, bedding, furniture and floors should be saved from soiling. The utmost cleanliness should be the aim under this rule.

Rule 2. If by chance the clothing or bed-clothing become soiled, the unclean articles should be washed in soap and water and boiled as promptly as possible; and the soiled places on floors or furniture should be washed up with a disinfecting solution, or at least with soap and water.

Rule 3. All discharges from the bowels should be disinfected promptly and carefully, and this work of disinfection should be continued for some days after the patient has apparently fully recovered.

The disinfectant used may be Solution 8 of the State Department of Health, consisting of 4 tablespoonfuls of Kreso or Coro Noleum to the gallon of water, a quantity of it three or four times as large as that of the discharge to be disinfected and the infectious matter should be left exposed to the action of the disinfectant three or four hours. More than one chamber vessel will thus be needed.

Or, the vessel may receive boiling water, eight or ten times the bulk of the discharge. Keep from rapid cooling.

In the case of infants, the soiled diapers should be immersed promptly in a quantity of the disinfecting solution kept for that purpose in a tub or large crock.

Rule 4. In the final disposal of the discharges from the patient and of the water used in the washing of the diapers, there should be very great care not to throw them out where they might possibly pollute and infect wells springs, or other sources of drinking water.

Rule 5. Remember the great danger of carrying infection to the food and to the things used in serving food by invisible particles of infection upon the fingers, even after the hands have been washed, if the washing is not thoroughly done. The rule must therefore be that the mother, or nurse who cares for the sick one shall give her hands a careful and prolonged washing with soap and water if they have been soiled with the discharges, or other unclean matter, giving particular attention to the spaces under the finger nails.

Rule 6. With babies these infectious diarrheal diseases are much more likely to occur among those that are fed from the bottle. One reason for this is that there are so many chances for unclean matter and infection to be carried to the mouth of these children in the milk and milk-mixtures or by the nipples, bottles or other containers that are not kept strictly clean.

There must be constant care that milk all the way from the cow to the baby is kept clean. In the home, everything in which the milk is kept and everything used in making up the milk-mixtures and in feeding the baby must be kept as clean as soap and water and boiling can make them. (See Circular 272).

Rule 7. By means of screens, and otherwise, flies should be kept out of the home and particularly from the sick room, else they will carry infection to food from the sources of infection within the home or from privies outside. For lessening the prevalence of these diarrheal diseases and of typhoid fever, privy-vaults so built that flies cannot get into them should be insisted upon.